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ABSTRACT

The Leadership in Public Affairs program at the College of New Jersey has begun to implement a developmental model designed to increase the community and political engagement of students. The primary tool to achieve these ends is public policy-oriented, community-based research (CBR). To date, two courses and a student fellowship based on policy-oriented CBR have been piloted. The next stage is implementing the components as a developmental sequence. This paper outlines the objectives of the program, describes its components, and presents some initial assessment results that are compared to analysis of findings from other studies. The paper stresses that, while providing extended policy-oriented CBR experience within single courses has produced promising initial results, moving to a developmental model significantly strengthens the program and increases the positive impacts on community and political engagement. It points out that the true leap to a developmental program occurs in the 2003-2004 academic year when students who have completed at least one of the CBR courses will be invited to assume leadership positions. (Contains 14 references and 2 tables.) (BT)

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Using Public Policy-Oriented Community-Based Research to Boost Both Community and Political Engagement

ED 481 425

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The Leadership in Public Affairs (LPA) program (directed by myself) at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) has begun to implement a developmental model designed to increase both the community and political engagement of students. The primary tool to achieve these ends is public policy-oriented community-based research (CBR). To date two courses and a student fellowship based on policy-oriented CBR have been piloted. The next stage will be to implement the components as a developmental sequence. The present essay outlines the objectives of the program, describes its components, and presents some initial assessment results which are compared to analysis of findings from other studies.

Community Engagement Versus Political Engagement

Although community service has become well institutionalized in American education, there has been considerable debate over its effectiveness, especially with regard to its impact on explicitly *political* engagement. Results and analysis of research on this topic are presented in detail in this section because they form a critical context for the program presented in the remainder of the essay.

While participation in community service and volunteerism clearly have an positive impact on the propensity of young people to dedicate themselves to further service, the evidence of the effects of service on *political* engagement is, at best, mixed.

Negative results for community service in promoting political engagement in young people have been reported in several studies. For example, Hunter and Brisbin (2000) conducted a pre-test/post-test survey of students enrolled in service learning courses at three West Virginia colleges in order to assess the effects of service learning on the political attitudes of students. While students generally had positive experiences with service learning, the results consistently failed to show a link between service learning and changes in attitudes toward politics. A survey of youth conducted for the National Association of Secretaries of State concluded that even the simplest forms of political participation seem unaffected by involvement in community service, stating "Volunteering and voting are unrelated. Voting and volunteering are not statistical predictors of one another, nor are the two variables significantly statistically correlated" (1999). In his review of the literature Galston posits that youth turn to community service as a *rejection* of political engagement, since ". . .most young people characterize their volunteering as an alternative to official politics, which they see as corrupt, ineffective, and unrelated to their deeper ideals" (Galston, 2000, 5).

Table 1 about here.

On the other hand, evidence that community volunteerism does contribute to increased political engagement can be found in my analysis of the results from the 2002 CIRCLE Youth Survey, as presented in Table 1A. Statistically significant relationships exist between frequency of volunteering and likelihood to join a club or organization that deals with government and politics and likelihood to volunteer in a political campaign, although these relationships are weaker than their non-political counterparts. Although there is a statistically significant relationship between frequency of volunteering and receiving political information from television news, it is quite weak. Yet, even in this data, an examination of the relative frequency of civic behavior for these 15-25 year olds reveals a clear preference for community organizations over political ones. For example, although 38% volunteered for community

organizations and 47% joined an organization that does not deal with politics, only 13% volunteered for a political campaign and 13% joined and organization that deals with politics. Youth who pursued both forms of engagement represented only 8% of the sample for both volunteering and joining. Furthermore, the relationships between volunteering for, or joining, community versus political organizations are quite weak, although statistically significant: Tau-c=.109 (p=.000, N=588) for volunteering for both political and non-political organizations, and Tau-c=.073 (p=.010, N=582) for joining both.

Cross section data of the 2001 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) from my own institution (TCNJ) support the hypothesis of a disconnection between community service and interest in politics. The results of comparisons are presented in Table 1B. The frequency of undertaking community service as part of a class was highly associated with the intent of these entering freshmen to engage in additional volunteer work and moderately associated with their intent to take part in a community action program, be a community leader, and help others in difficulty. It was weakly associated with influencing social values and very weakly associated with keeping up with political affairs. The association between service and intent to influence the political structure was essentially non-existent. These questions from the CIRP survey were used to fashion part of an assessment tool for the project described later in this essay.

Given the mixed, but generally discouraging empirical record, the burden of proof is certainly on any program that purports to increase political engagement through participation in community-based activities.

Policy-Oriented CBR As a Solution?

To address the separation of community service and political engagement some have begun to recommend measures for transforming service endeavors directly into political advocacy projects. For example, Robinson (2000) challenges the traditional "depoliticized" conception of service learning by arguing for an explicitly left-leaning, justice advocacy program. Similarly, Mack (n.d.) describes the evolution from service to advocacy at his institution (University of Hawai'i at Manoa). Marullo and Edwards (2000) make the case for the institution-wide politicization of service learning programs.

This would seem to be the most direct way to boost the impacts of engaged learning experiences on political behavior. But in reality it creates a deep dilemma. Pushing students engaged in service toward traditional advocacy is asking them to engage in the very thing they appear to reject in turning to volunteerism and service. It asks them to take part in some of their least popular activities (Lake, et al., 2002, 12). Thus the dilemma: reinforce disconnections between community service and politics by keeping them separate, or lead civic volunteers somewhere they do not want to go, asking young people to engage in a political system they (especially frequent volunteers) increasingly find repugnant.

The Leadership in Public Affairs program has adapted the Community-Based Research (CBR) model to address this dilemma and to resolve other limitations of traditional service learning. CBR is a community engagement tool draws students into long term applied research projects with community partners. As described by Strand, et al. (2003) it consists of three essential ingredients: research collaboration between faculty, students, and community partners (research is done *with* not *on* community members), employment of multiple sources of knowledge and dissemination with emphasis on the applied value of the research to the

community, and an underlying goal of social change for social justice. By its very nature as an extended and sophisticated academic experience CBR addresses many of the shortcomings of traditional service learning projects: their extremely limited duration, the failure to thoroughly integrate the community service component into a challenging academic experience, and an individual amelioration approach which fails to confront students with the broader structural injustices that give rise to need.

However, even with an underlying goal of social justice, CBR projects will not necessary lead students to direct engagement with the political system. The program developed by the Leadership in Public Affairs (LPA) program focuses CBR onto public policy projects to make this final connection to politics explicit throughout. Yet, at the same time, policy-oriented CBR as implemented in the LPA is not direct advocacy. Rather it is an intermediary step between service and advocacy. This is a "leading the horses to water" approach where students, through policy-oriented CBR projects, work closely on research projects in collaboration with local citizen organizations involved in policy advocacy. Students are not explicitly instructed to become politically active, but they are given every implicit encouragement, and some key tools, to do so. Moreover they work on academically valuable projects in the collaborative context that is characteristic of both volunteerism and CBR but is decidedly uncharacteristic of traditional political activism. Support for a sense of personal interest and efficacy in politics, without a particular ideological bent, is embedded throughout the program, from course readings that reveal stories of success among grass roots efforts to influence policy (as well as failures) to the selection of community partners that are activist but issue- rather that candidate- or party-oriented, and local rather than national. These groups are far from institutionalized power with leadership positions accessible by ordinary citizens. In sum, the LPA program is designed to move students from an interest in community service to an interest in political participation while simultaneously providing them with an alternative, much more appealing, model of political behavior.

The Leadership in Public Affairs Program

The Leadership in Public Affairs program currently consists of two courses and a student fellowship that have each been piloted but not yet sequenced into a developmental model of student learning and engagement. Policy-oriented CBR forms the backbone of each course (described below), comprising 40% of the course grade. During the 2002-2003 academic year the work of the 30 students in the two courses was greatly enhanced by four students enrolled as Bonner Leaders, a program of the Corella and Betram F. Bonner Foundation, primarily funded by Americorps, in which students commit to a minimum of 300 hours of service over a year. Bonner Leaders developed initial contacts with community partners and maintained relationships with them, helping to ensure that the CBR projects undertaken were of value to the community partners as well as to the students.

The introductory course in the planned sequence, POLS207 Citizen Democracy, involves students in research-based collaboration with local grass-roots citizen groups. The course readings range from political science research and debates over the efficacy of citizen participation (Skocpol and Fiorina, 1999), to case-study selections highlighting individual achievement in influencing public policy (Frantzich, 1999), to applied work on effectively developing grass-roots organizations (Rubin, 2000). The bulk of the course is a small group CBR project where students function very similarly to political consultants for area grass-roots

organizations, primarily helping them to improve their organizational effectiveness in light of the policy and political contexts within which they operate.

In the spring, 2003 semester, the students in Citizen Democracy collaborated with three Trenton-area groups: Trenton Cycling Revolution, which seeks to influence transportation planning and public safety programs for the benefit of bicyclists; Extraordinarily Ewing, which focuses on building public support for approving the budget of the Ewing Township School District in annual elections; and Citizens Against the Power Plant, which successfully derailed a new power plant project in Bordentown Township. In preparation for these collaborations individual students briefly profiled a series of other issue-based organizations of their choosing, including on-site and phone interviews. They were then offered the opportunity to select the one of the three community partners with whom they would work for the remainder of the semester (and the opportunity to devise their own project if they had ideological objections to the pre-determined partnerships, but none of the students exercised this option).

The three student groups conducted their CBR using primary resources, including meetings and interviews with the leadership of their partner organization, organization and newspaper archives, public records, maps and public data, announcements of administrative rulings and legislative proposals, and, in one case, an opinion poll. The use of primary resources was enhanced by class discussions connecting the theoretical and practical wisdom of the course readings to the research problems at hand. In addition to working with the individual student groups, one or more representatives from each of the partner organizations appeared as guest lecturers for the entire class. Each student group produced an analytical report of about 15 pages with specific recommendations which was then forwarded to their partner organization for its use and comments.

The second course, POLS318 Urban Political Economy, is a mid-level course (albeit without formal prerequisite) that engages students in understanding the dynamics of urban change and in working with a local organization to help neighborhoods cope with these dynamics. Its disciplinary basis is broader than the Citizen Democracy course, as it draws on economics, sociology, history and urban planning as well as political science. Yet it is also narrower in a sense as it focuses specifically on the evolving relationship between the core city and surrounding suburbs. The course readings for Urban Political Economy range from a traditional urban politics text (Harrigan and Vogel, 2003), to an explicitly pro-participatory work on urban renewal (Sirianni and Freidland, 2001), to applied readings on neighborhood indicators projects designed to support the major assignment.

Student taking the course in spring, 2003 undertook a brief preparatory assignment where they profiled and mapped important policy issues in their own neighborhood and hometown using original interviews and publicly available information and data. Then they divided into groups to produce sections of a large report for the Trenton Council of Civic Associations (TCCA), the community partner for the course. The TCCA is an umbrella organization for approximately 20 neighborhood based community groups and is quite influential in Trenton politics. The class project was designed to complete baseline work on a neighborhood indicators system for the Trenton area. The class was divided into three groups by topic area for the wide range of topics researched, from issues in health and education, to developments in economic revitalization and public safety. The three most important resources for students were direct regular access to community leaders, including six guest speakers (a deputy police chief, publisher of the city's paper, director of the county improvement authority, and others), a database/geographic information system (GIS) of Census 2000 and other public data sources

assembled by myself and Bonner Leader students, and a 180 article newspaper archive compiled by Bonner Leaders students. While the entire class attended a monthly meeting of the TCCA at the beginning of the semester, student groups and individual students worked with members of the TCCA to collect and refine material for their report during the term.

By the end of the semester, the three student groups had completed 45 pages of analysis supported by maps and data. However this large project necessarily transcended a single semester, and here the Bonner Leader students provided an invaluable contribution to the project. Bonner Leaders worked through the summer editing the report, developing a set of 15 analytical maps, and preparing all of the material for presentation to the TCCA for its use and comment.

Initial Assessment of the LPA program

The policy-oriented CBR projects undertaken by students in the courses provided extended, academically intense experiences. But did they achieve the objectives of producing changes in student attitudes expected of both successful service/volunteer programs (such as increased interest in helping others and contributing to community programs), and at the sane time, have a positive impact on student interest in political engagement? Initial assessment provides a positive answer.

The assessment tool employed for the two courses described above was a pre-test/post-test experimental/comparison group design. Given their similarity of design and small size, data from both CBR courses were pooled for an experimental sample size of 29 (Bonner Leaders were not assessed). Data from a similar pairing of political science courses taught by different instructors in the same semester (introductory level American Government and intermediate level Civil Liberties) were pooled to form a comparison group with a sample size of 31. Students in each course completed matched questionnaires modeled on the CIRP in the first and last week of the term. Although the course assessments and the CIRP data presented earlier (Table 1B) cannot be directly compared, given the radically different research designs and sample sizes, the CIRP data does present a valuable context for the course assessment data.

Table 2 about here.

Results of the assessment for seven selected items which would support the effectiveness of policy-oriented CBR courses in both community and political engagement values are presented in Table 2. Statistically significant (at $p<.05$) differences between the CBR classes and comparison classes were found in six of these items. Students completing the CBR courses reported increased interest (versus the comparison group) in helping others, participating in community action programs, and in finding a career providing the opportunity to be helpful to others/society. These are outcomes typically of effective service learning experiences and volunteer programs. Yet these same students also reported increased interest (versus the comparison group) in influencing the political structure (at $p<.01$), influencing social values (at $p<.01$), and becoming a community leader. Of particular note is the strong relationship between completing the courses and increased interest in influencing the political structure, which failed to show a significant relationship in the cross-section based CIRP data.

The one relationship in Table 2 that failed to show statistical significance (although it did show an increase) was between enrollment in one of the CBR courses and keeping up to date with political affairs. This is probably due to the fact that a majority of the students in all four

courses measured were political science majors, had very high interest at the outset (as shown by the means in Table 2), and thus there was very restricted variance for the experimental treatment to show an effect.

Two important qualifications need to be kept in mind in interpreting these results. First, the sample size was quite small, with 29 students combined in the CBR courses and 31 in the comparison courses. Secondly, students were not randomly assigned to the groups, self-selecting courses. However the CBR nature of the two courses was not advertised in the catalog and students in both groups came from a similar range of backgrounds. The results of this initial assessment must be considered tentative, but they are encouraging.

Toward A Developmental Model

While providing an extended policy-oriented CBR experience within single courses has produced promising initial results, moving to a developmental model will significantly strengthen the program, and it is hoped, increase the positive impacts on both community and political engagement.

The LPA program will be sequenced in a manner designed to fulfill the Bonner Foundation's guidelines for student development in engaged learning programs, with students moving from initial exposure to engaged learning, to building applied research skills through CBR courses, to leadership positions leading CBR projects and community outreach projects. Citizen Democracy and Urban Political Economy will continue to provide the core CBR experiences, although scheduled in a manner more conducive to taking them as a sequence. While some students may have their introduction to engaged learning in Citizen Democracy, it is anticipated that most will have already completed service learning courses, either prior to college or as part of TCNJ's general education service requirement. The Bonner Leader students, who are on full year appointments, will continue to play crucial roles in managing relationships with community partners and providing continuity to projects across semesters.

The true leap to a developmental program will occur in the 2003-2004 academic year when students who have completed at least one of the CBR courses will be invited to assume Bonner Leader positions. In addition to the above mentioned duties, the Bonner Leader students will play leadership roles in initiating a multi-part, community-wide, deliberative democracy program which builds on the research undertaken and the partnerships established in the CBR courses. The deliberative democracy program will become the public side of the LPA program, centering on a series of large, open citizen forums and conducted in partnership with the area's primary newspaper, key community organizations, and elected officials.

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Table 1. Results from Two Surveys on Service Versus Community and Political Engagement among Youth.

A. CIRCLE Youth Survey (2002). Frequency of Volunteering* Compared to (N~570):		
Comparison Variable	*Tau-c*	*p*
Likely to join a club or organization that does NOT deal with government or politics.	.323	.000
Likely to join a club or organization that deals with government or politics.	.307	.000
Likely to volunteer in a community organization.	.363	.000
Likely to volunteer in a political campaign.	.317	.000
Receive political information from television news.	.110	.001
B. The College of New Jersey Results from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey (2001). Frequency of Community Service as Part of a Class Compared to Intent to (N=1175):		
Comparison Variable	*Tau-c*	*p*
Perform volunteer work	.593	.000
Take part in community action program	.255	.000
Be a community leader	.210	.000
Help others in difficulty	.206	.000
Influence social values	.119	.000
Keep up with political affairs	.074	.003
Influence the political structure	.027	.259

*Volunteering variable was collapsed from the original 10 categories to 4 prior to analysis. "Don't know" responses were dropped from all variables prior to analysis.

Table 2. Results from Pre-Test, Post-Test Study of Two Politically Oriented CBR courses at The College of New Jersey.

QUESTION	**MEANS**				**ANOVA**
Please indicate the importance to you personally of each of the following (:	*Pre-Test*		*Post-Test*		
	Comp.	*Exp.*	*Comp.*	*Exp.*	
Participating in a community action program	2.42	2.38	2.55	2.62	Time: F(1,58)=.41 Group: F(1,58)=.007 TimeXGroup: F(1,58)=4.45*
Becoming a community leader	2.84	2.62	2.65	2.83	Time: F(1,58)=.005 Group: F(1,58)=.009 TimeXGroup: F(1,58)=4.41*
Helping others who are in difficulty	3.35	3.14	3.16	3.31	Time: F(1,58)=.014 Group: F(1,58)=.042 TimeXGroup: F(1,58)=4.3*
Influencing social values	2.65	2.76	2.77	3.34	Time: F(1,58)=15.59*** Group: F(1,58)=3.9 TimeXGroup: F(1,58)=6.37**
Keeping up to date with political affairs	3.35	3.55	3.45	3.66	Not Significant
Influencing the political structure	2.52	2.72	2.45	3.24	Time: F(1,58)=4.55* Group: F(1,58)=7.10* TimeXGroup: F(1,58)=7.52**
Finding a career that provides me with the opportunity to be helpful to others or useful to society	3.39	3.07	3.32	3.45	Time: F(1,58)=2.35 Group: F(1,58)=.31 TimeXGroup: F(1,58)=4.67*

* p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

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